

# 11 Million Reasons: Transmitting Inclusion in Dance

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Cell Block Tango for Chicago inspired image. Dancers: Kimberley Harvey, Louise Dickson, Beth Gardiner, Laura Dajao and Sian Green. Photo: Sean Goldthorpe; © People Dancing (2014) All Rights Reserved.

# 11 MILLION REASONS: TRANSMITTING INCLUSION IN DANCE

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## **Keywords**

disability  
photography  
nostalgia  
exhibition  
Yvonne Rainer

## **Abstract**

This chapter discusses the *11 Million Reasons* photographic exhibition commissioned by People Dancing in the UK, which features dancers with disabilities reconstructing still images from 20 well-known films that highlight dance. Comments by the dancers are woven through the chapter to inform the discussion, which also looks to examples of iconic dance photography to ask a number of questions about what the images transmit, and the extent to which the exhibition elicits nostalgia in the viewer.

## Opening

In a recent conversation with dance artist Welly O'Brien, when asked about how she saw her role in some of the photographic images in the *11 Million Reasons*<sup>1</sup> exhibition, she replied it is 'just a picture.' Whilst an apparently casual and throw away remark, it led me to think how this comment actually reveals a great deal about the relationship between the dancer and her image, and more particularly perhaps in relation to this exhibition. *11 Million Reasons* is a photographic exhibition led by People Dancing in the UK and funded by Unlimited Impact, created to positively profile Deaf and disabled people who dance. Disabled photographer Sean Goldthorpe was commissioned by People Dancing to create images inspired by iconic dance moments from film. Taking three months to complete, the project involved 160 people and took place in over 12 indoor and outdoor locations in the UK. The aim of the project was to "demonstrate how photography can reach audiences that wouldn't normally access disability arts."<sup>2</sup>

Returning to O'Brien's comment it invites a number of considerations. Does she view the subject, theme or aim of the 'picture' as unrelated to her 'real work' as a dancer or is her image in this particular collection far removed from her own dancing identity? Does she see her role as simply 'servicing' the aims and needs of the exhibition so she has less personal investment in the project overall? Or does she regard the 'picture' as having little general value as a representation of the dance and/or the work she wants to do and does do? In this chapter I will probe these questions to ask how this project shapes discourses around identity, agency, and embodiment in dance, specifically through the lens of disability. Beginning with an overview of this particular exhibition in the broader context of the dance 'still' versus moving image, I will discuss the exhibition from my own perspective as a viewer with some insider knowledge of the project as a whole<sup>3</sup> and will draw on comments shared with me about the exhibition from some of those dancers who feature in the exhibition in response to questions relating to their role in the project, their motivation for taking part, and their response to the image once included in the exhibition.<sup>4</sup>

In developing some broader thinking around this particular exhibition, the notion of the 'picture' in dance and the questions that have arisen out of O'Brien's remark, I will seek to argue that the exhibition exposes two core themes that I will briefly explore in turn. The first is the perception, reception and representation of disability in dance, and the problem of agency when the individual artist is portrayed through a 'still' that seeks to replace the non-disabled with the disabled performer. I ask whether the still image transmits a truthful or fictive idea of the dancer in motion and does the image erase or falsely convey agency and movement potentiality? Or in the stilling of the (disabled) dancing body is the body rendered immobile, silent and unable? Or do the images, now widely circulated, transmit an important statement about disabled bodies in dance? Or are they now 'utilised' images wherein the individual dancer is reduced to a 'message'? The second theme is that of nostalgia, which operates both within the image and its associations, and which relates to disability as bodily condition and as memory.

## Exhibition

*11 Million Reasons* was developed in 2014 by People Dancing with the expressed aim to create "stylish and challenging images [in which] Deaf and disabled people are centre stage as they re-imagine memorable dance scenes from a broad range of well-known films."<sup>5</sup> The exhibition comprises 20 images, inspired by and from the original images, and features a number of dancers with physical, cognitive or unseen disabilities who were invited to take part in the project. It has toured to 11 UK venues and 2 international venues (Zagreb and Macau). The images have been the inspiration for a much wider *11 Million Reasons to Dance* programme of work that has been designed to take dance by disabled people to what are regarded as 'cold spots' in the UK, where disabled people have less opportunity to participate in and/or view dance. The photographic exhibition has been shown as part of this larger tour, presented in galleries, in theatre foyers and a variety of other settings.



The images are intended to be quickly recognisable because they reconstruct photographs taken from famous popular films that feature dance in some way. Many of the original photographs have been in wide public circulation, often for promotional purposes, reflecting the high visibility, reproducibility and ubiquity of the photograph as a medium of representation. Films featured include *Black Swan* (2010), *Billy Elliot* (2000), *Chicago* (2002), *The Sound of Music* (1965), *The Blues Brothers* (1980), *Saturday Night Fever* (1975), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Step Up 2* (2008), *Step Up 4* (2012), *The Full Monty* (1997), *Grease* (1978), *High School Musical* (2006), *Hairspray* (2007), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), *Smooth Criminal* (1988), *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Flash Dance* (1983), *The Red Shoes* (1948) and *Dirty Dancing* (1987). The point of the exhibition is to encourage the viewer to 'look again' and to notice that a familiar image is made 'strange' because the movie star is replaced by someone new, and in many cases by a person with a different physicality. The aim is thus to encourage the viewer to see disability as something positive, as in all ways equal to the non-disabled performer who created the 'original' image; to "positively profile Deaf, sight impaired and disabled people who dance, and to desegregate them from anyone else who dances [...] to change people's views around disabled artists and disabled people."<sup>6</sup> The images are intended to be seen as a collection; it is in the totality of the images that the force of the 'message' is intended to be received and be most affecting.<sup>7</sup>

Goldthorpe cleverly manages to capture the atmosphere of the movie in which the dancers have been inserted, created through lighting and staging, shot in both indoor and outdoor settings. In *Black Swan*, for example, dancer Sian Green is closely resembling the Natalie Portman back-view tutu-wearing silhouetted figure, shot from upstage, as she is facing the imagined audience centre stage in full light. In the original, Portman's legs are blurred and out of clear shot, but are likely imagined as they are seen elsewhere in the film; carving out a classical line and pointe-shoe clad.<sup>8</sup> But in Green's recreation the bright spotlight in which she is standing highlights her lower body unveiling a shadowy prosthetic lower leg. The semiotics of ethereality and bodily reality are craftily juxtaposed, perturbing the classical image of an 'ideal female ballet body.'<sup>9</sup>

In another image, there is something of an irony in the description provided for O'Brien's reconstruction of *The Red Shoes*, in which according to the image caption she is Vicky Page 'longing to be a ballerina,' reaching forward to a red ballet shoe hanging by its ribbons on a tree in front of her. Whether the reference to 'longing' is to draw attention to the discriminatory ableist aesthetic inscribed in ballet which effectively rejects any body that diverges from the classical ideal, or is to suggest O'Brien is longing to be able to wear *both* her red shoes is not clear. Moreover, because O'Brien always chooses to dance without her prosthetic leg, which is reflected in the image, and O'Brien has described how the floor is her 'natural home,' seeing her in a ballet pose (supported by a non-disabled dancer who is *en pointe*), and which emphasises the vertical and an apparent resistance to the floor and pull of gravity, is a curious proposition. In her other image in the collection she is held high above the head of Mickael Marso Riviere in an adaptation of the famous lift from *Dirty Dancing* as another apparent flight away from her home ground.

Elsewhere, Jacob Brown's seated recreation of John Travolta's dance floor scene in *Saturday Night Fever* resembles more of a composite of Travolta's many face-to-camera disco moves rather than his iconic asymmetrical 'arm pump' move. Another wheelchair dancer, Laura Jones from Stopgap Dance Company, takes up Julie Andrews' opening scene from *The Sound of Music* with what looks like a playful dare situated atop a steep hillside. Several images feature two or more dancers, including *Chicago* with five women, described in the image's caption as recreating the 'sassy Cell Block Tango.' As five women in provocative poses, this image could be read as foregrounding an exploration of the disabled female body and spectatorship. Disabled people experience always being 'on display' in public spaces.<sup>10</sup> When the dancers here are invited to re-embody the non-disabled female bodies, which were (and are) purposefully on display, their disability is made hyper-visible, but as the dancers have discussed, their roleplay was not always self-determined. As one dancer commented:

Being the type of dancer/performer I am, I would never be in a show like *Chicago*, so this was a rather unique opportunity for me as a performer to be captured in that way [...] I am acutely aware that I do not have the physicality of your typical Fosse dancer, so it definitely resonated with me when Louise Wildish said that she wanted *11 Million Reasons* to capture those iconic dance moments from classic films by recasting the lead roles with Deaf and disabled dancers.<sup>11</sup>

What we can't tell from this recreation is if the original actors were similarly uncomfortable in their 'sassiness.'

## Image

The dancers I spoke to all described how the photo shoot was set up in advance of their arrival by People Dancing Producer Louise Wildish in collaboration with Goldthorpe. They were given their role, the costume, and the shoot began. As one dancer explained:

We did not have any say in what images we were in and also the set designs were already decided as I believe Louise [Wildish] and the photographer had a clear vision. Everyone on set was very happy and comfortable with what they had to do and they briefed us before the day.<sup>12</sup>

For another dancer, the clear set-up was welcomed – “They knew what they wanted, what would work and so my job, as the performer, was to go in and take on that role. I enjoyed that challenge!”<sup>13</sup> – even though the role she was given felt very unlike her personal character or how she would choose to be seen. When asked if they identify with the image that they have recreated, one dancer exclaimed:

It's not me at all, which is hilarious! Sexy or sultry doesn't come naturally to me! People who know me are generally surprised when they see the image - I don't think they expect me to be in an image like that as it's completely at odds with my character as a person. I like the fact that it surprises them! It surprised me too!<sup>14</sup>

Although clearly unfamiliar, for this dancer it didn't appear to produce any discomfort. For another, this role playing seemed more problematic,

commenting that “[t]he image of me is pretty opposite to my sense of how I naturally move or choose to move in choreographic/performative contexts.”<sup>15</sup>

When asked what motivated them to take part in the project, some dancers admitted that they agreed to participate because it was paid work, and one because of the loyalty she felt to the people involved. To the extent that the dancers retained some sense of ownership over their contribution is less clear because their involvement was pre-designed and because their contributions were limited to being directed to take up the same pose created by the star of the original movie. There are many stakeholders in the project who could claim authorial control and responsibility (People Dancing, Goldthorpe, the various rights holders as well as the reconstructing dancer) and the multiple processes involved in producing the exhibition complicates the claim of authorship in the work.

It is likely that a shoot of this nature would have raised questions for many dancers who are unfamiliar with a process of stepping in to an already established ‘set up’ and asked to take on a particular character role. But for dancers with disabilities the intention for them to replace a body with a very different corporeality, to re-embody a normative body, precisely to demonstrate that they “are capable of the same passions as an able bodied person”<sup>16</sup> may well have unintentionally reinforced an unhelpful hierarchy and thereby a distinction between the ‘disabled’ and ‘non-disabled’ body. Several dancers found this comparison unhelpful and for one dancer it was a particularly uncomfortable experience, saying:

Personally [...] I don’t think there is great value in suggesting that a certain strategy or ‘events’ elevates disabled people to be equal with non-disabled people. This seems to perpetuate a hierarchy that in my view is already dominant in the way the work of disabled artists is viewed.<sup>17</sup>

Another agreed: “I don’t think it’s particularly helpful as a statement. It baffles me that in 2017 disabled people can still be perceived as somehow fundamentally different to other (non-disabled) human beings.”<sup>18</sup> But this dancer continued by expressing how important the exhibition is precisely for its equalizing impact, commenting, “[t]herefore, all the more reason for there to be an exhibition like this. Some people really need it ‘spelt out’ to



them that we are all human, regardless of physicality, disability.”<sup>19</sup> One dancer was more positive about the statement by remarking “I do think the review is right by saying that statement as I really do think people’s outlook is changing on what people with disabilities can do. The Paralympics speaks for its self that we are training to have no limitations.”<sup>20</sup>

Whilst the exhibition has a particular aim and is thus perhaps not easily aligned with other photographic exhibitions where dance features so directly, it does elicit responses and might raise questions that have some connection with other dance photography exhibitions. These questions revolve around the play between ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’ that any photographic image has the potential to explore. For example, Art Historian Carrie Lambert examines the photographic records of American postmodern choreographer, Yvonne Rainer’s iconic work, *Trio A*.<sup>21</sup> Lambert states that they seem to be “particularly misleading”<sup>22</sup> because “the camera stills the dancers of *Trio A* in moments of physical drama”<sup>23</sup> which Lambert argues contradicts the ‘truth’ of the work and Rainer’s “radically antispectacular dance programme.”<sup>24</sup> Lambert goes on to consider whether there can actually be any such thing as dance photography (acknowledging the categorical differences between dance as “an art of time and motion” and photography as the art of “the temporal and spatial freeze”)<sup>25</sup> and continues by suggesting that Rainer’s *Trio A* has a prime directive – constant motion.<sup>26</sup> Her essay offers a richly insightful and extensive analysis of *Trio A*, frequently examining the role of the photograph and Rainer’s apparent resistance to the camera, but concluding that the “camera does not so much freeze *Trio A* as distill it.”<sup>27</sup> Lambert raises interesting questions about the ‘truthfulness’ of the photographic image, which can fix dancing bodies into spectacular pictures that may be at odds with the moving body itself.

Rainer’s *Trio A* is a single and now historic and iconic performance work in its own right so is very different from *11 Million Reasons*, which is first and foremost a photographic exhibition of multiple images, linked thematically by featuring famous moments from dance movies over time. However, it could be argued that the exhibition relies on the viewer being able to ‘call up’ the movie in their memory or imagination. The viewer is even encouraged to imagine how the disabled dancer would embody the rest of

the movie that the single image arrests in time. Imagining the whole performance of *Trio A* that *did* generate the photograph is quite different from imagining how the dancer might embody the rest of the movie that the single image appears to arrest in time, but which never happened.

In *11 Million Reasons* there are several truths and fictions operating simultaneously. The images that are being reconstructed are drawn from films that are fictional stories, created with dance as the central theme as a form of fantasy, escapism, as tragic narrative, or to promote the transformative potential of dance. The images further fictionalise the original image by attempting a reconstruction that produces a faux version of the 'original' pose. And yet the image is attempting to portray the truth of the individual dancer in terms of her or his physicality or cognitive impairment. The dancers are asked to recreate the position of the performers in the original image and yet a further truth/fiction is that the image is apparently 'stilling' movement for the purpose of the photograph but what movement took place to capture the pose in *11 Million Reasons* was not that which produced the still image in the original – something I discuss further below. Further, whilst some dancers have sensory impairments or 'unseen' disabilities so they appear to have no 'visible' disability, the aim was to draw attention to the variety of disabilities and the specific reality of each performer's disability and how they perform the 'truth' of their disability through the image. For at least one dancer the image did not portray her truth as a dancer or convey a sense of how she moves but she did not see that as a problem saying: "It's completely different from the dancer I usually am and I love that! I feel quite proud actually, as it isn't something I would usually think I could do."<sup>28</sup>

In the UK, photographer Chris Nash, is probably the most well-known documenter of contemporary British dance, photographing many works by major choreographers since the 1980s. His approach on the face of it seems to share some of the same principles as Goldthorpe's method. Rather than photographing dance performed 'live,' Nash sets up the shoot in the studio, and according to performance theorist Matthew Reason, constructs the set up "to produce still images that are evocative of movement and the experience of dance."<sup>29</sup> However, as Reason argues, "Nash produces photographic images that are very explicitly *made*, not

taken”;<sup>30</sup> he works collaboratively with the choreographer to generate material for the camera, working through movement material, getting the dancer to repeat a section for the camera.<sup>31</sup> This process of studying the dance in process, of transformation of the image for the camera, followed by further digital manipulation, is one place where Nash and Goldthorpe diverge in their work. The image in *11 Million Reasons* relies on the transformation of the image after it is taken, without dwelling on studying the dance in process, which may be why they do not so much imply or anticipate motion or prompt a reading of movement into the still image.

Reason claims that “in the context of our engagement with images of dance it is clear that we are most often less interested in movement knowledge – the empirical observation that movement happened – than in the subjective response to movement.”<sup>32</sup> What then is our subject response to the ‘movement’ in *11 Million Reasons*? What is our perception of movement when there is no motion? Can the image re-present the experience of the dance and evoke a kinesthetic empathy through the medium of the image when there is no implication of a body moving? Or is it in the potentiality of movement that the power of the image lies? One of the dancers refers to her own embodied sense of movement potential by describing how she related to the image she was in because it was her life before her accident (that resulted in a physical disability), and even though she was “just posing for the image and not actually dancing” she said, “it gave me that feeling like I was just about to take the stage again.”<sup>33</sup>

In Reason’s analysis of Nash’s photography, in which his focus is kinesthetic imagery, and through which he weaves Nash’s own words, he argues for how Nash’s images provide “an ambiguous starting point from which movement seems possible but where – crucially – the exact nature and indeed meaning of that movement is determined by the viewer’s imaginative and emotional engagement.”<sup>34</sup> In *11 Million Reasons*, the images might well convey the possibility of movement but the exact nature of that movement is determined more by the viewer’s memory and knowledge of the film from which the image emerges rather than what is evoked through the image itself and imagining what the dancer might or might not be able to reconstruct. Because the image is simultaneously extracted from and situated within another ‘object,’ that of the film that the

image is reimagining, it might well thwart an emotional engagement for the viewer. Our response may be guided by knowing that the dancer/s are recreating a frozen moment from a longer sequence that may already be 'known' (or remembered) but which could not be performed in the same way, so might impede our subject response.

All photography plays with imagining the dance that the image stills but these images betray the possibility of a before and after; there is little evocation of movement beyond the pose.

Details in most images are surprisingly static, denying any indication of motion. There is no blurring, nothing obscured or fuzzy to suggest something in motion. Only the images for *Billy Elliot* and *Step Up 4* convey a sense of the dancer 'caught' in action. In the former, Jake Maguire is captured mid-move recreating the moment Billy Elliot tells his father he wants to dance. In *Step Up 4*, bboy Denny Haywood is photographed mid-battle. If we agree with Reason's point that "[t]he still image must always enact a distinct interpretation, a selective construction, which in its choices, omissions and creativity tells us more about attitudes to and understandings of performance than merely pointing us towards what it purports to show,"<sup>35</sup> then the inadvertent effect of the stilling of the (disabled) body in most images is that it appears to render the disabled dancing body immobile, silent, even unable, even whilst ably reconstructing the static pose.

Paradoxically, whilst the image stills the body, for some dancers a disciplined, composed stillness is actually physically impossible. As performance practitioner and theorist Margaret Ames observes; "we might observe that disability often makes impossible the feat of quieting the multitude of reflexes, and discharges of internal activity externally. Stillness is a controlled neurological act as much as dancing is. Disability often externalizes internal processes of spasm, fluctuation of tensions and decision at play with indecision."<sup>36</sup> Staging the shoot thus must have demanded an elaborate set-up to establish the pose. Dealing with the individual dancers' unique bodies, movement patterns, assistive technologies and sensory impairments, doubtless also played a role in determining the practicalities of the shoot. For dancers with disabilities it often takes more time to arrive, prepare, and be physically ready to work

than for non-disabled performers. Some may also need support workers to facilitate their involvement. If assistive technologies are needed, such as a wheelchair, then time needs to be built in if the dancers work both in and out of the chair. For O'Brien, whose mobility in daily life is facilitated by a prosthetic limb, but who dances without the prosthetic, time is needed for her to put on and take off her leg when leaving and joining the shoot. 'Crip time,'<sup>37</sup> which describes the traces of temporal shifting in disabled people's lives that mark a difference with normal time<sup>38</sup> is likely to have been a factor in the shoot. Crip time is a reality that affects levels of stamina and cognitive effort, yet refuses to see disability as defining a pre-determined limit.

## Nostalgia

The play between the distant or recent past that is invoked through the collected images suggests that *11 Million Reasons* functions as a platform to express nostalgia. Moreover, the exhibition can be read as aligning with recent thinking about a 'false nostalgia,' described by media cultural theorist Katharina Niemeyer as "a pleasure-seeking yearning for former times that we have not, in fact, lived."<sup>39</sup> The images of 'old movies' are thus replete with an inherent longing or yearning for a previous time, for stories of how dance drew lovers together, how dance transforms lives, how dance was a metaphor for redemption, social cohesion and community identity – and how dance became a vehicle for exploring issues as diverse as body image, unemployment, racial segregation, British working class culture, loss of homeland, and the transition from 'silent' to 'talkie' movies in the film industry itself. Whilst these themes might function in current dance practises, the aesthetics of the past image (the pose, the setting, the implied narrative, the costume, the lighting mood) seep into the present image, creating a nostalgized present.

Niemeyer discusses further the theme of nostalgia and observes that the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was marked by "an increase in expressions of nostalgia, and in nostalgic objects, media content and styles."<sup>40</sup> Niemeyer's project asks: "what is nostalgia *doing* and what role *do* media play in a context of progress and crisis?"<sup>41</sup> Whether or not *11 Million Reasons* is part of this nostalgia wave of retro styles and vintage moods, as Niemeyer



discusses, is what I consider here. In relation to nostalgia, Niemeyer describes how “media can be used as an *ersatz* stand-in for former rituals, feelings or past, without actually replicating them exactly.”<sup>42</sup> On one level, the images in *11 Million Reasons* could be perceived as an *ersatz* stand-in for the original images. However, the emphasis on ‘reimagining’ rather than attempting a more faithful ‘reproduction’ of the image resists the idea that the images are a substitute for the original and are therefore in some way inferior. And yet there is also a sense of artificiality that may run counter to the intention for the exhibition to positively profile disabled people who dance and which seems to underpin some of the dancers’ experiences of their role within the shoot. One dancer commented on this:

I think the impact of so many images is in some way empowering, [...] however I think it could have been far more powerful if the images were of ‘authentic’ dancing by the artists. This would suggest more agency in the work.<sup>43</sup>

The exhibition would likely be of interest to Cinema Studies scholar, Vera Dika, who examines the use of images from film history in contemporary culture to argue for evidence of a growing nostalgic style.<sup>44</sup> Dika’s primary focus is film but she talks about images being ‘returned’ from the past; “the image returns not as representational of the natural real, but as simulacral, as a copy of copies whose original has been lost.”<sup>45</sup> In *11 Million Reasons*, the original image is not ‘lost’ so functions differently, and as I note above, not as an inferior version of an ‘original’; rather, the images are a form of recycling for a specific purpose of ‘positively profiling’ disability, and promoting equality and access. The images are constructed stagings of pictures, so become pictures of pictures thereby addressing “the very structuring of meaning and temporality in the film/photographic image.”<sup>46</sup> In the context of Dika’s examination, it is interesting that she refers to *Singin’ in the Rain*, one of the films that features as an image in the exhibition, which itself complies with illusionistic conventions being a film within a film (by telling the story of putting on the show in a film musical within the film).<sup>47</sup>

There were hints of nostalgia in a few of the dancers' comments although it was not clear whether these reflective remarks emerged because of the photographic project or were a condition of their dancing now in relation to a dancing (or non-dancing) life prior to a disability, if a disability was acquired. One dancer stated:

I don't identify with the image or film it relates to. However, my partner in the image is one of the first people I ever danced with over 20 years ago so that has meaning for me, actually it makes me a bit sad that it's not an image of us – just re-connecting.<sup>48</sup>

The dancer expresses a heartfelt connection with a past experience that the project promotes even though the image she creates does not recreate her memory of that connection. It is an expression of nostalgia as related to memory, since it recalls times and places that are no more, or are out of reach.<sup>49</sup>

The theme of nostalgia in relation to disability has emerged in another context, when disabled artists and commentators questioned what was termed the 'golden age' of disability arts, identified as being during the 1980s and 1990s, in the focus on archiving work in the recently opened National Disability Arts Collection and Archive (NDACA).<sup>50</sup> If there was a 'golden age' of the past, disabled artists asked, what about the present and the future? Does disability arts have to accept that the good times are over, that we have to look back and not forwards? The artwork that emerged during that time, named 'protest art,' was certainly powerful and the archive project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, is intended to preserve and make visible some of this work that captured the energy of the time and expressed the frustrations of artists.

*11 Million Reasons* is not intended to be a protest work but does provide an alternative, if static, alternative archive of disabled dance artists. In a different way to that of *11 Million Reasons*, the NDACA project might also be experienced as a project of nostalgia, whilst acknowledging that people with disabilities can distrust nostalgia if it creates a sentimental and fictionalised past, which was not a better time. *11 Million Reasons'* reimagining of past movies does not communicate that life in the past was better for people with disabilities. Indeed, whilst movies have frequently *portrayed* people with disabilities, few have ever directly *involved* disabled

people. In the dance films featured in the exhibition, I can find no trace of a disabled person in the cast list. But nostalgia need not always be about the past. It could be thought of as a projective prologue whereby motives are projected on the future, producing a different kind of fantasy and fiction. This is where *11 Million Reasons* can do its work, to offer an alternative to a future of fantasy and fiction, whereby dancers with disabilities are ‘centre stage,’ where their disabilities are not seen as deficit or lack, and their interpolation, integration or inclusion in the non-disabled professional performance context is not as ‘outsiders’ needing to comply with or conform to ableist and hegemonic performance traditions. Rather, as the exhibition aims to show, their own specific embodiment and particular way of moving is re-presenting the variety and ‘normality’ of differently-abled bodies, whilst alerting visitors to the exhibition to their own variety and difference.

## Closing

*11 Million Reasons* raises several issues that focus on the relationship between the photographic moment and the moving image, between permanence and transience, between normative and non-normative bodies, and between ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’ in dance.

I began by citing Welly O’Brien. Her comment in tandem with her own presence in the exhibition has prompted the questions that have underpinned my analysis. For some who feature in the exhibition, their images are not how they perceive themselves as dance artists, so seem to be far removed from their own dancing identity. But most experiences were positive and even for those who felt that their own image did not convey their own artistry, the project appears to have made a positive impact on their own work. One commented:

It’s opened my eyes more to what I can do. To know that I can surprise myself is a great feeling as an artist! Continuing to reaffirm the excitement and importance of coming out of my comfort zone. Made me want to be more mischievous as a performer/artist.<sup>51</sup>

Another explained that her motivation for taking part was that:

It sounded great fun! It wasn't something that I had seen done before and I could imagine it grabbing people's attention, surprising them...perhaps, making them think about why this is different from what they would usually expect. To me, this is a positive thing.<sup>52</sup>

I have attempted to give voice to the dancers who feature in the exhibition, who can easily be eclipsed by the 'weight' of the movie that the image recalls, and by the message of the exhibition as a totality, so could mean that the dancers feel they are 'in service' to a wider project of advocacy and political action. The individual artist can sometimes be lost in the heft of the 'whole.' However, all those I talked to expressed their hopes for the project overall and were optimistic about the broader impact and benefit of the project. For one, the hope is that the exhibition will open people's eyes to preconceptions that they have/society has/we all have in some way, remarking:

I want people to see it and enjoy it! The photographer has done a great job with the exhibition. And I hope that on some level it contributes to society continuing to begin to see disabled people not as some 'other' being. We are all human beings and it's our differences (in every sense), regardless of whether or not you have a disability, that make us who we are as individuals.<sup>53</sup>

Two dancers referred to how it had also benefited them. One commenting:

My hope for the project is for it to carry on with its success and hopefully show other people with disabilities that we all can dance. Doing this shoot helped me not only see what I was capable of but it helped me connect with other people with disabilities too. Also, it gave me the confidence to pursue other opportunities that came my way, as I then went on to be a part of the Paralympic advert for the BBC twice, both involving dance.<sup>54</sup>

And the other:

In practical terms the project overall has continued to offer me employment in the engagement strand (teaching, mentoring) it has also given opportunity to perform my own work as part of the wider project brief.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, one dancer summed up the way the project has divided views by offering: “I would hope that this project could be a catalyst for another exhibition/collection that makes space for the ‘real’ dancing and experiences of disabled artists.”<sup>56</sup> Authenticity and actuality is a theme that underpins much of the intentions and outcomes of the exhibition. Overall, *11 Million Reasons* is perhaps best described as a catalyst; for showing what different bodies can do when they inhabit the spaces of stage and screen, and for helping to change public perception of disabled people.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The title *11 Million Reasons* reflects the fact there are more than 11 million disabled people in the UK.

<sup>2</sup> See: [www.doingthingsdifferently.org.uk/events/11-million-reasons](http://www.doingthingsdifferently.org.uk/events/11-million-reasons).

<sup>3</sup> I had several conversations about the project with Louise Wildish, project producer, at the start of the project and during the development of the *11 Million Reasons to Dance* project that led out of the exhibition.

<sup>4</sup> Questions I asked included: What motivated you to take part in the project? Did you have any role in deciding what film/what image you would participate in? Was there opportunity to contribute to the image set up? Having seen the outcome, do you feel you can identify with the image you appear in? If so, how? One review talks about the way the project sends the message that disabled people ‘are capable of the same passions as an able bodied person.’ Do you think this review is helpful or useful in how people might view and respond to the project? Do you think that the images and the project overall conveys or draws attention to agency of the dancers who feature? Do you think the images convey a sense of how you dance/move or do you think the still image constrains or prohibits imagination of your dancing? What is your own hope for the project? How would you describe the project’s impact on your own work as an artist? The artists were contacted and responded



mostly via email and all comments by the dancers included in this chapter are taken from these communications.

- <sup>5</sup> The description of the project is provided on the People Dancing website: [www.communitydance.org.uk/developing-participation/11-million-reasons-to-dance](http://www.communitydance.org.uk/developing-participation/11-million-reasons-to-dance).
- <sup>6</sup> This description is provided on the People Dancing website: [www.communitydance.org.uk/developing-participation/11-million-reasons-to-dance/photography-exhibition](http://www.communitydance.org.uk/developing-participation/11-million-reasons-to-dance/photography-exhibition).
- <sup>7</sup> Unlimited Impact, who provided financial support for the project, refer to the message of the project, saying “The stunning, powerful, emotive, and humorous images are diverse with many bringing a subtle but relevant message”: [weareunlimited.org.uk/our-reason-to-see-11-million-reasons](http://weareunlimited.org.uk/our-reason-to-see-11-million-reasons).
- <sup>8</sup> Another ‘fiction’ is created here as Portman is not a trained ballet dancer but put in many hours of training in preparation for the film so she could be convincing in her role.
- <sup>9</sup> There are plenty of sources that discuss the ‘ideal ballet body’ – see for example: [dancemagazine.com.au/2011/07/the-ideal-ballet-body](http://dancemagazine.com.au/2011/07/the-ideal-ballet-body).
- <sup>10</sup> Sandahl and Auslander, *Bodies in Commotion*. [muse.jhu.edu/book/6367](http://muse.jhu.edu/book/6367).
- <sup>11</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>12</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>13</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>14</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>15</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>16</sup> Cleasby, “A photographer has recreated famous movie dance scenes with disabled dancers,” no page number.
- <sup>17</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>18</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>19</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>20</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>21</sup> Rainer, *Trio A*.
- <sup>22</sup> Lambert, *Moving Still*, 87, [no-w-here.org.uk/mediating.pdf](http://no-w-here.org.uk/mediating.pdf).
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 89.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 91.

- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 110.
- <sup>28</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>29</sup> Reason, "Photography," 240.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 241.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 247.
- <sup>33</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 251.
- <sup>35</sup> Reason, "Documentation," 114.
- <sup>36</sup> Ames, "Dancing Place/Disability," 178.  
[cadair.aber.ac.uk/dspace/handle/2160/29993](http://cadair.aber.ac.uk/dspace/handle/2160/29993).
- <sup>37</sup> Alison Kafer, *Feminist*; Kuppers, "Crip time."  
[yale.instructure.com/files/1435608/download](http://yale.instructure.com/files/1435608/download).
- <sup>38</sup> Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*.  
[www.scribd.com/document/116994411/Rosemarie-Garland-Thomson-Extraordinary-Bodies](http://www.scribd.com/document/116994411/Rosemarie-Garland-Thomson-Extraordinary-Bodies).
- <sup>39</sup> Niemeyer, *Media and Nostalgia*, 9.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 1.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 2, original emphasis.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 12, original emphasis.
- <sup>43</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>44</sup> Dika, *Recycled culture*, 11.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 3.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 8.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 19.
- <sup>48</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>49</sup> Niemeyer, 5.
- <sup>50</sup> A report on the project and reactions to it are here:  
[www.bbc.co.uk/news/disability-35063050](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/disability-35063050).
- <sup>51</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>52</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>53</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.

- <sup>54</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>55</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.
- <sup>56</sup> Email communication with contributing artist.

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